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General News

THE EVENING STAR

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MY TRIAL IN RUSSIA

American Finds Himself Isolated
In Small Town in Soviet UkraineBy MARK KAMINSKY
(As Told to ~~the~~ ~~author~~)

LAFAYETTE, Ind., Oct. 30.—We were sitting in the Russian customs house a few miles from Uzhgorod, worn out by a month-long motor trip across Western Russia and the Ukraine. After a series of annoying border difficulties, we were finally hoping to get clearance to leave the country. We already had been delayed more than half a day by frontier guards.

The customs men had told us it would be only another few minutes until we could drive across the no-man's land separating us from Czechoslovakia. We were alone in the room. But all of a sudden, all five of them trooped back in. A hunchbacked one, who acted as their spokesman, glared at us for a moment. Then he said: "Because of the material we have found in your possession, we have decided to give you a personal search. Kaminsky, you're first—follow us."

He gestured toward the next room. I entered, and while he and two other men stood by, they ordered me to empty my pockets. After protesting briefly, I complied. But I couldn't understand why they were so suspicious of me.

Pounced on Notebook

The objects I took from my pockets included some of the film rolls I had stuffed into them at the customs men's orders before, and my notebook. They pounced on the notebook, because I had forgotten to mention it when they had asked me to give them all the addresses I carried on my per-

son. I had forgotten that I had scribbled a few addresses in it. They ordered me to strip down to my shorts. They inspected every piece of clothing with meticulous care, lingering and fingering with the seams, linings and pocket flaps. After going over my clothes item for item, the hunchback came over and made certain that I was not wearing a money belt under my shorts.

The guards continued examining my clothing and personal effects. They got more and more excited, giving me the impression that their "discoveries" were the biggest thing that ever happened to the border detachment near Uzhgorod.

When they had satisfied their curiosity, they motioned me to get dressed again. Then they ordered me out of the room and gave Harvey Bennett, my companion, the same treatment.

Became Frightened

There is nothing like such treatment to make a man feel humiliated and helpless. I didn't know what they wanted with me. By now I was frightened, and I demanded that we be allowed to contact the nearest U. S. representative.

At that moment, some American tourists coming from Czechoslovakia entered the border station. They were being processed outside and I sidled outside the building and started

talking to them in English. They were an elderly couple, and seemed to understand Russian. They looked at me rather strangely when I explained our predicament and asked them to contact the U. S. Embassy in Moscow. I told them Harvey and I were being detained because we had been accused of taking forbidden pictures.

They didn't say anything. Meantime, a Russian guard who understood some English heard my efforts to talk to them and approached us. He ordered me roughly to "get back inside, and away from these people." He said I wanted to make "nothing but trouble."

I felt deserted. The American couple perhaps didn't want to ruin a vacation trip by getting involved in an "incident" just as they entered the country. In any event, I doubted whether they would relay my message to the Embassy.

(When the American press carried the news that we were missing, they contacted the State Department in Washington and told of seeing us in the border station.)

After Harvey Bennett, too, had been searched, the border officials made us sign papers that our films and my notebook had been taken from us, and that we held no material claim against them for mistreatment.

Then a tall man in a blue suit came into the room where we were being held and told us that "unfortunately" we would not be able to leave Russia until the matter was cleared up, which might take until the next day.

I insisted once again that either we be allowed to contact

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the United States Embassy in Moscow or that we be released immediately. The tall man—let's call him "Blue Suit"—said: "You can call the consulate from Uzhgorod."

We were taken back to Uzhgorod and ordered to check into the "Summit" hotel. A shifty-eyed man from Intourist, the official Soviet travel agency, had been summoned to the scene in the meantime. "Blue

Suit" handed him our passports, and he took them into custody (which is standard procedure in all Russian hotels). In spite of the Intourist official's smiling servility, I didn't like the looks of things, or the Intourist man, for that matter.

The first thing we did, once we were back at the hotel, was to go to the Post Office to call the U. S. Embassy in Moscow. Two men followed us and sat in the lobby. The operator told us we would have to wait at least an hour until our call could be completed.

We decided we would also send a telegram to the American consulate, explaining our predicament. Then we went back to the hotel. The two men who had followed us stayed at the Post Office.

All Efforts Futile

When we returned at the end of an hour to inquire about the long-distance call, the operator told us she "could not contact the Embassy." We continued to try and ring the Moscow number. Harvey Bennett knew one of the consular officials in Moscow and tried to reach his residence. But all our efforts were futile. We never did get through to the Embassy nor, incidentally, did our telegram ever reach its destination.

By the time we went to bed that night, Moscow seemed the remotest spot in the world. As for the United States, my home town, my family—they seemed on another planet entirely.

The next day I asked the government representative, whom we later began calling "Grind-

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stone." whether I was under arrest. He replied quickly: "No, no, we are just having a friendly little 'chat' with you fellows, trying to clear up all these matters." He also added that we were free to "take a walk, or something," whenever we pleased. On asked how much longer we would be detained in this manner, he replied, simply, "Maybe another few hours."

The same pattern of interrogation lasted for nine days. With one exception: Harvey Bennett's sessions with "Grindstone" grew progressively shorter, while mine stretched out—until with a morning, afternoon and night-time grilling, they occupied most of my day.

In the meantime, the Russian secret police had translated my diary, notebook and photo-log. On the first day that "Grindstone" had this translation on hand, he began asking me why I had taken these notes. When I countered that I had the vague idea of writing a book at the end of my trip, he bellowed: "You had no such intention; you are an intelligent agent."

"You came here last year," he went on, "and you came back again because we did nothing to catch you. You are a wolf trying to get into the manger so that you can hurt the peaceful sheep. But we won't let you."

As he continued his accusations, day in, day out, he had a habit of acting out every one of his statements in comic-opera fashion, lurking in the shadows, photographing imaginary "secrets," and taking furtive notes.

Accused of Being Spy

The pressure of the interrogation increased as the days went on. When he finally got to a photograph I had taken of a radar installation and the corresponding notation in my diary, his eyes lit up and he beamed, "Now we are hitting pay dirt." "Grindstone" accused me of being a spy, of being sent by Allen Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence

Agency, to ferret out Soviet military secrets.

These accusations, incidentally, seem to have been picked up by the American press from Russian press releases. I would like to state once again for the record that I was not an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency or any other intelligence organization.

As the interrogation pressed on, "Grindstone's" manner seemed to change. He grew friendlier, more paternal. And, strangely, I began to accept him as a person of authority. He seemed to be pleased and found me "co-operative," when, under pressure of his tutoring, I admitted that the book I had intended to write might not have been friendly toward the Soviet Union.

He even suggested a title for it: "The Soviet Union Talks of Peace and Prepares for War," and when, dead tired, I admitted that I might have called it so, he entered it into the record as a fact.

I was unaware of what was going on. Was I being "brain-washed?"

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(Next: Transfer to Prison)

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OCT 1 1960